

Under Two Dictators - Prisoner of Stalin and Hitler
by Margarete Buber-Neumann, translated by Edward Fitzgerald with a
Foreword by Nikolaus Wachsmann. Pimlico 2009.

As the years pass distancing us from the events of the Second World War the number of personal memoirs increases. As the survivors and first generation refugees enter the life of everlasting peace so more and more diaries and reminiscences come to light, often preserved by their families but hitherto never published. These memories are not only a reminder of extraordinary personal suffering and courage, but also a potent resource for historians and those who would seek to prevent the Shoah and its lethal statistics from being traduced by Holocaust deniers.

Margarete Buber-Neumann's memoir is unusual in that it was written and published before 1950 making her a public figure in post-war Germany and contributing to the prosecution of former Nazis for crimes against humanity. What makes *Under Two Dictators* more powerful than other examples of the genre is the fact that, in the cruellest of twists, Margarete fell foul and suffered at the hands of two totalitarian dictators, Stalin and Hitler, first being sentenced to the Gulag and then transferred to the Nazis under the terms of the Brest-Litovsk agreement and imprisoned in the Ravensbruck concentration camp until the end of the war.

Margarete was married very briefly to Raphael, the son of Martin Buber, with whom she had two children although she lost custody of them when the marriage ended in a very bitter divorce. A committed Communist, she then married Heinz Neumann, the love of her life, who was shot in a Soviet purge in 1937. The cruelty of her fate thereafter is preserved in the pages of *Under Two Dictators*, and it is a harrowing and powerful tale that reminds one of *A Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovitch* and Elie Wiesel's *Night*.

Under Two Dictators has not been in print for 50 years and a new generation can now read and absorb its lesson from history of the evils of totalitarianism, regardless of political hue, and wonder at the indomitable spirit of a brave and courageous witness.

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